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THE BRILLIANT DIPLOMACY OF CILICIAN ARMENIA

Claude Mutafian

By the end of the eleventh century, the main Armenian kingdoms had been annexed by Byzantium, and the Christian West was preparing a Crusade—a Holy War—towards Jerusalem, then ruled by the Egyptian Fatimids. The regions of Cappadocia, Euphratesia, and Cilicia, under Byzantine or Muslim control, were situated on the route from Europe and Constantinople to the Holy Land. In that historical frontier between Byzantium and the Caliphate, a steady Armenian population had been present for centuries, as the result of the Byzantine policy of population transfers. The Armenian element increased further because of mass migration of princes in the face of Turkic invasion and conquest.[1] At the dawn of the twelfth century, this constellation of nobility, which had come under Byzantine suzerainty, was surrounded by the Seljuk Turks north of the Taurus Mountains, the Danishmendid Turks to the northeast, and the newly created Latin Crusader states of Edessa and Antioch to the east and south. In order to survive and eventually to restore Armenian statehood, a clever diplomacy vis-à-vis Greeks, Franks, and Turks was necessary.

Armenians and Franks (1099-1137)

While the Taurus Mountains constituted an effective protection against the Turkish threat to the north, Byzantium, weakened by the defeat at Manzikert (Malazkert) in 1071 and the loss of all central Anatolia to the Turks, could hardly control such a remote

[1] For details and bibliography, see Claude Mutafian, *La Cilicie au carrefour des empires*, 2 vols. (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1988), vol. 1, pp. 365-72.

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province as Cilicia. The Crusades posed the most immediate danger, and Armenian policy toward the Crusaders had always been two-sided. These newcomers were potential and sometimes actual rivals, but at the same time they could also be used as tactical allies.

For a Catholic, any "non-Chalcedonized" Armenian remained a heretic. Intermarriage revealed itself as an effective Armenian diplomatic weapon: all but one of the twelfth century Rubenid (Rubenian) barons married Greek or Latin princesses,[2] while the two first kings of Jerusalem (former counts of Edessa) took Armenian wives. A sister of the second king, Baldwin II, married the Rubenid baron Levon (Leo/Leon), whose sister was to be the wife of Josselin of Courtenai, third count of Edessa.[3] Many Armenian princes began by playing the Latin card, like Bagrat who joined the Crusaders as soon as they left Constantinople in the spring of 1097, or Firuz "the renegade," thanks to whom Antioch was taken in June 1098, or the Armenian anonymous commando who liberated the Frankish lords kept prisoners by the Artukid emir in Kharpert (Kharberd) in 1123.[4]

Despite these developments, the situation of the Armenian barons in the 1120s was still precarious. The counts of Edessa had wiped out Armenian ambitions in Euphratesia, which had been for a long time the stronghold of the great prince Gogh

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[2] See Matthew of Edessa, *Armenia and the Crusades*, trans. Ara E. Dostourian (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1993), p. 208, for Toros I; Orderic Vital, *Historiae ecclesiasticae*, ed., Marjorie Chibnall, vol. 6 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p. 135, for Levon I; Michel le Syrien, *Chronique*, trans. Jean-Baptiste Chabot, vol. 3 (Paris, 1905), pp. 281-82, for Toros II; Vahram d'Edesse, "Chronique rimée," in *Recueil des historiens des Croisades, Documents arméniens*, ed., Edouard Dulaurier, vol. 1 (Paris: Imp. impériale, 1869), p. 509, for Ruben; *La chronique attribuée au Connétable Smbat*, trans. Gérard Dédéyan (Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1980), p. 65, for Levon II. The only exception is Mleh, who married a Pahlavuni princess. See MS 1318, p. 120, Mekhitarist Library of Venice.

[3] See the genealogical study of Count Weyprecht H. Rüdt-Collenberg, *The Rupenides, Hethumides and Lusignans: The Structure of the Armeno-Cilician Dynasties* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1963), Tables I and V. See also Joseph Laurent, *Etudes d'histoire arménienne* (Louvain: Peeters, 1971), p. 144.

[4] See Guillaume de Tyr, *Chronique*, ed. Robert B.C. Huygens (Turnhout: Brepols, 1986), ch. 4, §1, p. 233, for Bagrat, and ch. 12, §18, p. 568, for the Kharberd affair. For a thorough study of Firuz, see Gérard Dédéyan, "L'Arménien Firuz," in *Félonie, trahison, reniements au Moyen Age* (Montpellier: Centre de Recherches sur l'Imaginaire et la Société au Moyen Âge, 1997), pp. 511-22.

Vasil, Bagrat's brother. It was only in Cilicia that a few magnates managed to survive the anti-Armenian policies of the Crusaders. The most prominent of these noble houses were the Byzantinophile Hetumids (Hetumians) in the west and the more independent and active Rubenids in the east. The Rubenids were clever enough to extend their domains at the expense of the Greeks without cutting their formal ties of vassalage with the emperor. Their Greek seals expressed their Byzantine rank, but they also struck Armenian coins—clear proof of their ultimate goal, the re-creation of Armenian statehood.[5]

Meanwhile, the Norman princes of Antioch had firmly taken possession of the Cilician plain, which had always been included in the Patriarchate of Antioch. In fact, one of the first measures of the Normans was the creation of two Catholic ecclesiastical seats in Cilicia, one at Tarsus and the other at Mamistra. The Armenian Church did not (and could not) object, and later on, under Armenian rule in the next century, these seats were to serve as convenient hostages in case of confrontation with the Catholic hierarchy. During the conflict between Normans and the Turkish Danishmendids, the Rubenids adopted a wise position of neutrality. Prince Levon I took advantage of this rivalry and conquered important territories in the Cilician plain and the Amanus passes. The new prince of Antioch, Raymond of Poitiers, had to use treachery in order to capture Levon in 1136, but he was liberated two months later after he promised an alliance against an imminent Byzantine expedition.[6]

Armenians and Greeks (1137-1187)

As a matter of fact, Emperor John II Comnenus (Komnenos) was at that time preparing for the military reconquest of Cilicia and Antioch. Byzantium had never renounced these territories. The next four decades of Byzantine rule over Cilicia (1137 to 1175)

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[5] See the texts and reproductions in Claude Mutafian, *Le Royaume arménien de Cilicie* (Paris: CNRS Editions, 1993), p. 22.

[6] See details in Claude Mutafian, "L'enjeu cilicien et les prétentions normandes," in *Autour de la première croisade*, ed. Michel Balard (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1996), pp. 453-63. For all the events related to Antioch, the primary reference work remains Claude Cahen, *La Syrie du Nord à l'époque des Croisades* (Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1940).

proved beneficent for the Armenians, particularly for the Rubenids, as Greek suzerainty dealt a fatal blow to Antiochene ambitions and contained the Turkish threat. During that period, the fall of the first Crusader state, the County of Edessa, which was captured by the emir Zengi in the middle of the twelfth century, further weakened Latin power. The Armenian Catholicos Grigor (Gregory) III took advantage of the situation and gained possession of the fortress of Hromkla, on the banks of the Euphrates, which remained the seat of the catholicosate from 1150 to 1292. These conditions suited the policies of Toros II, Levon I's son. Without ever confronting the Byzantine governors, Toros patiently regained control of the former Rubenid territories. He also maintained good relations with both Prince Reginald of Antioch, who had defeated him in 1156, and Emperor Manuel I Comnenus, who in 1158 launched the last imperial military expedition in the Levant. Toros was not in favor of the pan-Christian coalition which in 1164 challenged the powerful emir of Aleppo, Nur ad-Din, but he nonetheless loyally participated in the disastrous battle of Harim, where the coalition was severely defeated. He managed to escape and strengthen his de facto rule over Cilicia.[7] Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela, who traveled in the area during the late 1160s, described the harbor of Korykos as "the confines of the empire of Thoros, lord of the mountains, sovereign of Armenia."[8]

Toros II died in 1169. His brother Mleh immediately seized power and inaugurated an original and bold policy. He had been a Templar Knight and now hated the Latins.[9] He was also opposed to Greek overlordship and to the Byzantinophile Armenian factions, particularly the Hetumids. Moreover, he had been a

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[7] See details in Mutafian, *Cilicie*, vol. 1, pp. 379-80, 388-99. For these "Greek decades," see Ferdinand Chalandon, *Jean II Comnène et Manuel I Comnène* (Paris: Alphonse Picard, 1912), pp. 93-118, 182-93, 424-55, 527-33. For more recent studies, see Azat Bozoyan, *Byuzandiayi arevelyan kaghakakanutyune ev Kilikian Hayastane* [The Oriental Policy of Byzantium and Cilician Armenia] (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1988); Claude Mutafian, "Arméniens, Grecs et Latins en Cilicie," in Alain Ducellier and Michel Balard, eds., *Le partage du monde* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1998), pp. 186-89.

[8] For an English translation of Benjamin of Tudela's journey, see Thomas Wright, *Early Travels in Palestine* (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1848), pp. 63-126.

[9] See Guillaume de Tyr, *Chronique*, ch. 20, §26, p. 949.

refugee at Nur ad-Din's court and had developed good relations with the emir. It was natural for him, therefore, to seal an alliance with Nur ad-Din against both Byzantines and Latins. With the help of Aleppine troops, he pushed the Greeks and Latins out of Cilicia. This risky policy bore fruit. When Nur ad-Din died in 1174, Rubenid rule was firmly established over nearly the whole of Cilicia, except for the Hetumid domains. Arab historiography praises Mleh's policy, acknowledging that he benefitted more from the alliance than did Nur ad-Din, but Christian, particularly Armenian, historiography is scathing because of this Muslim alliance, wrongly identified with apostasy. Contrary to the popular belief, Mleh did not convert to Islam. He actually married a niece of Catholicos Nerses Shnorhali and settled the question of patriarchal succession in 1173, when two nephews of the late patriarch were claiming the right of succession. In 1175, Mleh was assassinated by Armenian barons, both because of his political orientation and his ferociousness. Nonetheless, his successful *Realpolitik* undoubtedly places him in the highest rank of the founders of Cilician Armenia.[10]

A year later, in 1176, the Seljuk victory of Myriokephalon practically put an end to the Byzantine threat and left Rubenid Cilicia confronting an internal foe, the Hetumids, and three external enemies: the Latins, the Seljuk Turks, and the emerging Ayyubid power under the famous Saladin, who became sultan of Egypt in 1169 after having overthrown the Fatimids. Mleh's successor, his nephew Ruben, began by punishing his uncle's murderers. He did away with Byzantine claims, as the empire was now too weak to attack, yet Ruben was soon confronted with the revival of the Antiochene threat. Prince Bohemund III captured him by treachery in 1185, but he was soon freed through the intercession of his brother Levon.

Armenians and Germans (1187-1198)

Prince Levon II succeeded his brother Ruben in 1187, and soon

[10] A fine example of Muslim judgment on Mleh is found in Al-Dahabi, *Les dynasties de l'Islam*, trans. Arlette Nègre (Damascus: Institut français de Damas, 1979), p. 148. A discussion on Mleh, with references to sources, is found in Mutafian, *Cilicie*, vol. 1, pp. 400-02.

thereafter he proved himself a political genius, dealing masterfully with the two important events that shook the Levant at the beginning of his rule—Saladin's victories and the Third Crusade. Saladin captured Jerusalem from the Christians in 1187 and Latakia the following year. Frankish Syria was on the verge of collapse, and the tiny principality of Antioch no longer had any Latin neighbors. However disturbing these developments, Cilicia was now free of the Antiochene danger. The fall of the Holy City prompted a new Crusade, led by the three most powerful Western monarchs. King Philip II Augustus of France and King Richard I the Lion-Hearted of England took the sea route, while the German Holy Roman Emperor Frederick I Barbarossa traveled by land, approaching the western frontier of Cilicia in the spring of 1190.

The Armenian baron Levon II at first had no clear policy toward the German emperor, but Frederick's arrival must have appeared providential. Seeking a royal title, Levon offered his services to the emperor in exchange for a crown. This prospect also served German interests, counterbalancing the excessive French influence in the Levant. The German emperor would certainly welcome an Armenian kingdom into the vassalage of the Holy Roman Empire. Christian sources confirm this to be the fact. Already in May 1189, Pope Clement III wrote to Levon II and to Catholicos Grigor IV to request their assistance for the German Crusade, then in preparation. Levon, for his part, contacted both Frederick Barbarossa and Pope Clement about the project of a royal crown.

In 1190, after having defeated the Seljuk Sultan Kilij Arslan II of Iconium (Konia), Frederick sent three messages to Levon. Soon thereafter, Frederick received a letter from Catholicos Grigor, stating that he looked forward to welcoming the Holy Roman Emperor. Frederick rejoiced at this and in reply confirmed that he was bringing with him a royal crown for the Armenians. Baron Levon had an ideal mediator: the Archbishop of Tarsus Nerses Lambronatsi (Nerses of Lambron), son of the Hetumid prince Oshin and of Shahantukhd, cousin of Catholicos Grigor IV. Well-known for his ecumenism, Nerses was sent first to Hromkla to the catholicos, then to Seleucia (Silifke) in order to meet the emperor. He was followed by Levon, together with the catholicos. But, alas, they all missed Frederick, who had

drowned in the Calycadnus (Goksu) River in June 1190 while the Armenians were on their way to meet him. Before the accident, however, he had conferred with some Armenian ambassadors.[11]

This overly simplified image of Armenian rulers being fully involved in the German Crusade is challenged by Muslim sources. In fact, such an uninformed view fails to do justice to Levon's political skills. The Rubenid baron was aware that any Armenian kingdom created in such a manner would become a puppet state within the German global imperialist project and that open participation in the Third Crusade would, in case of failure, provoke a conflict with Saladin. Further complicating matters was the fact that Hromkla remained an Armenian enclave in Ayyubid territory, and its survival depended on good relations between the catholicos and the sultan. Both Levon II and Grigor IV were obliged to feign an alliance with the emperor, but at the same time also to convince Saladin that they were not on the German side. There is no reason to question the authenticity of these Muslim sources, according to which the catholicos kept Saladin informed about the German Crusade. Just after Frederick's death, Catholicos Grigor sent a couple of letters to the sultan. The first, containing a strong anti-German tone, reported that the emperor had sent deputies to Levon, demanding very crudely that assistance be rendered while the Crusade passed through his territories. Levon's ambassadors sought—but obviously failed—to persuade the emperor to take another route. The second letter to the sultan described the weakening of the German army after Barbarossa's drowning.[12]

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[11] For Clement's letters, see Peter Halfter, *Das Papsttum und die Armenier* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1996), pp. 172-77; Léonce Alishan, *Léon le Magnifique, premier roi de Sissouan, ou de l'Arménocilicie* (Venice: Mekhitarist Press, 1888), pp. 162-65. For the other events, the main sources are Vardan Areveltsi in *Documents arméniens*, vol. 1, pp. 440-41; Kirakos Gandzaketsi, *Documents arméniens*, vol. 1, p. 422; *La continuation de Guillaume de Tyr*, ed. Margaret R. Morgan (Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1982), p. 97; Nerses Lambronatsi's colophons, especially those published in Nerses Akinian, *Nerses Lambronatsi* (Vienna: Mekhitarist Press, 1956), pp. 164, 300-01.

[12] The two main Muslim sources are Imad ad-Din al-Isfahani, *Conquête de la Syrie et de la Palestine par Saladin*, trans. Henri Massé (Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1972), pp. 193, 229-30, and Bahā' al-Dīn Ibn Shaddād, *The Rare and Excellent History of Saladin*, trans. Donald S. Richards (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), pp. 114-17. All attempts at proving these sources as forgery are unconvincing; they are summarized in Alishan, *Léon le Magnifique*, pp. 103-05.

Christian and Muslim sources are not contradictory but rather complement each other. With the specter of being squeezed between two powerful monarchs, Levon chose his intermediaries very wisely: the ecumenical Nerses of Lambron to the German Catholics; and Catholicos Grigor to Saladin, with whom he was on good terms. Barbarossa's death was in a sense a stroke of good luck for Levon, as it eliminated an immediate danger; however, it also eliminated provisionally the prospect of a royal crown because the emperor's younger son, who led the Crusade after his father's death, was not in a position to keep the promise, as his elder brother, now Emperor Henry VI, succeeded Frederick Barbarossa.

In 1194, Levon sent an embassy to Italy, reminding the new emperor of his father's promise. In search of allies in the Levant,[13] Henry VI in turn sent two royal crowns, one to Amalric of Lusignan, the governor of Cyprus, which had been conquered by Richard the Lion-Hearted, and to Prince Levon of Cilicia. Amalric was crowned at the end of 1197. Soon after, however, Henry VI died and his legate returned to Europe before having crowned Levon. In addition, the Armenian baron sent an ambassador to the German delegation at Acre and finally achieved his purpose. He aimed also at official recognition both from Byzantium and from the papacy. Through the intercession of Nerses Lambronatsi, Emperor Alexius III sent another crown. Some difficulties arose with Pope Celestine III, however. Rome as usual required some doctrinal concessions from the Armenian Church. Although the clergy was strongly opposed, Levon succeeded in convincing the prelates that concessions were purely tactical: they were expected merely to feign doctrinal alignment in order to secure Rome's recognition.[14] Everything worked according to Levon's wishes, and on January 6, 1198, in the cathedral of Tarsus, Levon was crowned as King Levon I, by the grace of "the

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[13] The Armeno-German honeymoon was illustrated by Wilbrand of Oldenburg's travel at the beginning of the thirteenth century. The excerpt about Cilicia appears in his *Peregrinatores Medii Aevi Quatuor*, ed. Johann C.M. Laurent (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs Bibliopola, 1864), pp. 173-80.

[14] Levon's cynically efficient policy is reported by Kirakos, *Documents arméniens*, vol. 1, p. 423. Latin prelates soon realized that they had been cheated. See, for example, Jacques de Vitry, "Historia Hierosolymitana," in *Gesta Dei per Francos*, ed. J. Bongars (Hanovia, 1611), vol. 1, p. 1095.

sovereigns of the Old Rome, Henry, and of the New Rome, Alexius," as reported by Nerses Lambronatsi.[15]

After the death of Saladin in 1193, the Ayyubid possessions were divided among his brother and his sons, substantially weakening the Muslim threat from Syria. At the turn of the twelfth century, the Rubenids had succeeded in recreating an Armenian kingdom. Levon's remarkable *Realpolitik* had paid off, despite a particularly difficult political context.

King Levon I "the Great" (1198-1219)

This new Armenian kingdom had four neighbors. Two of them were Latin: the Lusignan kingdom of Cyprus in the Mediterranean and the weakened Antioch principality to the south, disconnected from the rest of Frankish Syria. The others were Muslim states: the Ayyubid emirates to the east, mainly in Aleppo, and the powerful Seljuk sultanate (Iconium) north of the Taurus range. King Levon began to concentrate on Antioch. Five years before his coronation, in 1193, Levon had captured Prince Bohemund III; two years later, a reconciliation had been sealed by the marriage of Levon's niece, Alice, with Bohemund's eldest son, Raymond. Levon himself had already married, around 1188, a niece of Bohemund's third wife.

These matrimonial alliances enabled the Armenian king to control the weak Antiochene state after a century of claims by the then powerful princes of Antioch over the emerging Cilician Armenian baronies. Times had changed! Levon placed his candidate, his grand-nephew the young Raymond-Ruben, scion of the union between Alice and Raymond, as ruler of Antioch.[16] Prince Raymond, however, died in 1197 during his wife's pregnancy, and his younger brother, Bohemund IV, count of Tripoli, claimed the succession. The latter opposed Levon's integration

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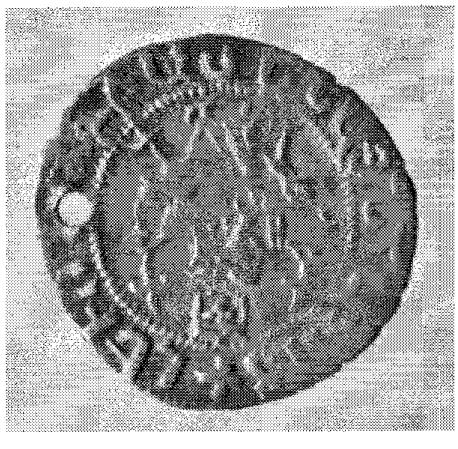
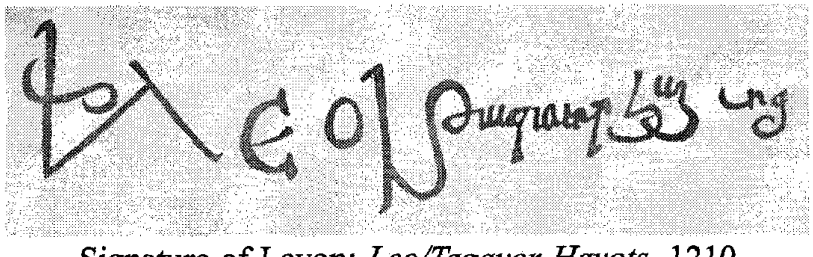
[15] This colophon published by Akinian, *Nerses*, p. 276, is an unquestionable proof concerning the coronation year as 1198. Some historians still stand for 1199. See also Sirarpie Der Nersessian, "The Kingdom of Cilician Armenia," in *A History of the Crusades*, ed. Kenneth Setton (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), vol. 2, p. 648n23. Sources and materials about the coronation may be found in *Smbat*, p. 72; Alishan, *Léon le Magnifique*, pp. 153, 169; Cahen, *Syrie*, pp. 589-90; Mutafian, *Cilicie*, vol. 1, pp. 170-71.

[16] See *Smbat*, pp. 65, 68, 71-72.

Leuonus (Levon I),
14th Century Latin Manuscript



Coinage of Levon, *Tagavor Hayots* (King of Armenia),
13th Century



Signature of Levon: *Leo/Tagavor Hayots*, 1210

of Antioch-Cilicia with an Antioch-Tripoli axis. The "Antioch succession war" lasted for two decades and saw two strange coalitions facing each other. On Bohemund's side were the Seljuk sultan, the emir of Aleppo (son of Saladin), and the Templar Knights, while his nephew Raymond-Ruben was supported by King Levon I, the Hospitaler Knights, and the sultan of Egypt (brother of Saladin). Diplomacy makes no case of religion. As regards the papacy, Innocent III remained on the Armenian side for nearly a decade, as long as he believed in the sincerity of Levon's concessions. Their relations became strained when he realized that the Armenian Church had no intention of respecting the 1198 agreement. Levon expelled the Catholic prelates of Cilicia (Tarsus and Mamistra) and was briefly excommunicated. In 1216, he finally succeeded in capturing Antioch and enthroned his grand-nephew Raymond-Ruben as prince. The pope recognized this accomplished fact and made peace with Levon.[17] But this was to be a Pyrrhic victory. Raymond-Ruben's policy was unpopular and his relations with Levon quickly deteriorated. After the death of the king three years later in 1219, Bohemund IV recovered the principality and evicted his rival.[18]

Levon paid a heavy toll for his Antiochene policy. Too busy in the east, he remained powerless before the growing might of the Seljuk sultans. He could not avoid the cession of certain territories in the north and the west. Even more, he opened the way to a kind of Seljuk suzerainty over the Armenian kingdom, demonstrated in the bilingual Armeno-Arabic coins that were soon struck as a symbol of Armenian vassality.[19] Levon was more successful in his matrimonial policy. He realized that the most important component of the Latin East was now the kingdom of

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[17] Documents about the relations between Armenia and Innocent III were on display in the Vatican exhibition of 1999. See the catalogue *Roma - Armenia*, directed by Claude Mutafian (Rome: De Luca, 1999), pp. 142-45, 155-56.

[18] For the "Antioch succession war," see Cahen, *Syrie*, pp. 596-631; Mutafian, *Cilicie*, vol. 1, pp. 413-14.

[19] For historiographic evidence on this subject, see Ibn Bibi, "Le sultan seldjoukide Keykobad I et l'Arménie," trans. Henri Massé, *Revue des études arméniennes* 9 (1929): 116; Simon de Saint-Quentin, *Histoire des Tartares*, ed., Jean Richard (Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1965), p. 70. Bilingual coins are discussed in Paul Z. Bedoukian, *Coinage of Cilician Armenia* (Danbury: Bedoukian, 1979), pp. 84-85, 227-35.

Cyprus. It was therefore essential to multiply matrimonial alliances with the Lusignan dynasty. The Armenian king repudiated his Antiochene wife Isabelle, who had given him a daughter Rita (Stephany for the Franks), and, at more than sixty, he married the barely-fifteen-year old Sibyl, daughter of Amalric I, king of Cyprus. Soon after Zabel was born. Near the end of his life, Levon was confronted with three candidates for his succession. The quarrel with Raymond-Ruben, whom he had first thought as his heir, left only his two daughters, Rita and Zabel. The first had married John of Brienne, king of Jerusalem. Levon made the wise choice and transmitted the kingdom to Zabel, then still a minor. His plan was to give her in marriage to the son of King Andrew II of Hungary, but it fell through.

Levon had entrusted the future queen to the Catholicos Kostandin (Constantine) I and two nobles. One of them was Levon's nephew, Constantine of Baberon, son of Levon's maternal uncle and a member of the Hetumid dynasty. The regents married Zabel to Philip, son of Bohemund IV of Antioch, a potentially dangerous move as it could lead to the Latinization of the Armenian kingdom. Philip behaved so crudely toward the Armenian barons that he was soon overthrown in 1224 and died in mysterious circumstances. As a second husband for Zabel, the regent Constantine imposed his own son, Hetum. This was a very clever choice, which put an end to the rivalry between the two dynasties, henceforth united at the head of the kingdom.[20]

Armenians and Mongols (1220-1300)

King Hetum I ruled from 1226 to 1269. His reign represents the apex of the last Armenian kingdom. His ascent to the throne coincided with the zenith of Seljuk power. The Sultanate of Rum extended from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean, from Sinope to Alanya, and was overlord of the Armenian kingdom. The invasion of Genghis Khan's Mongol armies from Central Asia in the 1220s radically altered the situation. The appearance of the vanguard of these armies in the Caucasus spread terror everywhere. The only chance of survival was to submit as quickly as

[20] This "Matrimonial Diplomacy" is discussed in *Smbat*, pp. 84-96, with further references in the notes by Gérard Dédéyan.

possible to these "Lords of the Universe." In the 1230s they devastated Greater Armenia, where the local princes accepted Mongol suzerainty. Fortunately, the Mongols did not engage in religious proselytism. In Cilicia, King Hetum I was kept informed of the events, particularly through Hasan Jalal, the mighty Armenian prince of Khachen in Artsakh (Karabagh), so he was aware of the Mongols' aversion to Islam and of their relative tolerance of Christianity, partly thanks to the penetration of Nestorianism into Central Asia. Two European rulers, Pope Innocent IV and King Louis IX of France, initiated some diplomatic approaches in the 1240s, but they refused vassalage under the Mongols, the primary condition set by the Central Asian empire for further relations.

In 1243, the Mongols crushed the Seljuk forces at Köse Dagh, near Erzinjan, sealing the end of Seljuk power in Asia Minor. Some Armenian princes of Cilicia had fought in the army of the sultan and remained faithful to Seljuk suzerainty. Among them were Hetum's maternal uncle Constantine of Lambron and his son Hetum IV of Lambron. Both were soon sentenced to death for high treason, victims of the king's opposite political orientation. After Kose Dagh, the defeated sultan of Rum had sent his family to the court of Sis, but the victorious Mongol general required their extradition. Hetum I had to make a quick decision: either remain in the Seljuk camp or pass to the Mongol alliance. Considering the balance of forces, *Realpolitik* obviously imposed the second choice, and he extradited the fugitives.[21] Persisting in this bold policy, in 1247 he sent his brother, the brilliant Smbat Constable, to Mongolia. Smbat met Khan Guyuk, grandson of Genghis Khan, and in a letter to his brother-in-law, King Henry I of Cyprus, praised the Mongol alliance.[22] This policy was threatened by anti-Mongol rebellions in occupied Greater Armenia, where the population was oppressed by un-

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[21] For a general overview of Armeno-Mongol relations, see Claude Mutafian, "Le siècle mongol," in *Arménie entre Orient et Occident*, ed. Raymond H. Kévorkian (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, 1996), pp. 174-83.

[22] A French translation of this letter is published and brilliantly commented by Jean Richard, "La lettre du connétable Smbat et les rapports entre chrétiens et Mongols au milieu du XIII[ème] siècle," in *Armenian Studies/Etudes Arméniennes: In Memoriam Haïg Berbérian*, ed. Dickran Kouymjian (Lisbon: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1986), pp. 683-96.

bearable taxes. In 1251, Catholicos Kostandin I issued an epistle, written by the famous intellectual Vardan. The catholicos expressed his confidence that the Mongols would lighten these oppressive taxes and exhorted the population of Greater Armenia to remain obedient to the Mongol overlords, as the Mongol alliance was the only security for the Armenian kingdom in Cilicia.[23] A few years later, in 1254, King Hetum himself traveled to Mongolia to meet the new Khan Möngke, another grandson of Genghis Khan, and to confirm the Armeno-Mongol agreement.[24] Events were soon to show that the Armenian king had made the right choice. After the collapse of Seljuk power, another and much more dangerous threat rose in the Muslim Middle East. The Mamluks overthrew the Egyptian Ayyubids in the middle of the thirteenth century and by the 1260s were masters of all Egypt and Syria, with the exception of the three coastal Latin states. This new and powerful sultanate could be challenged only the Ilkhanate of Persia, one of the four divisions of the Mongol empire.

The Ilkhanate had been created east of the Euphrates River by Hulagu, brother of the Khan Möngke. In 1258, Hulagu had sacked Baghdad, putting an end to the five-century history of the Abbasid Caliphate. The following year, Hulagu was escorted by King Hetum in his victorious campaign against Ayyubid Syria. Hetum participated in the bloody sack of Aleppo and in the capture of Damascus, recovering as a reward the territories between Cilicia and the Euphrates which had left Hromkla isolated from the kingdom. For various reasons, in particular the death of Mongka, Hulagu hastened back to Mongolia before having conquered Syria, and the troops he left behind were soon defeated by the Mamluks.[25] The tide turned as the Mamluk sultanate

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[23] The manuscript text was discovered in 1954 in the now called National Library of Saint Petersburg by Levon Khachikyan who published and analyzed it in *Banber Matenadarani* 4 (1958): 267-84.

[24] King Hetum's journey is described in detail by Kirakos Gandzaketsi, *Patmutyun Hayots* [History of Armenians], ch. 58, ed. Karapet A. Melik Ohanjanian (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1961), pp. 364-72; trans. John A. Boyle, "The Journey of Het'um," *Central Asiatic Journal* 9 (1964): 176-89.

[25] See *Smbat*, pp. 101-07. A recently discovered letter of Hulagu to King Louis IX of France has been published by Paul Meyvaert, "An Unknown Letter of Hulagu," *Viator* 11 (1980): 245-59.

passed into the hands of Baybars (1260-77). These changes in the Middle East coincided with the conversion to Islam by another Mongol state, the Golden Horde, in southern Russia, thus preventing the Ilkhanate from concentrating on the Mamluk front. The result was a weakening of Mongol protection for the Armenian kingdom.

The first Mamluk strike against Cilicia took place in 1266, while Hetum was away in Persia seeking Mongol help from Ilkhan Abagha, son and successor of Hulagu. The Mamluk army forced the Amanus passes and devastated Cilicia, and two years later put an end to the Latin principality of Antioch. In 1275, Baybars personally led another invasion of Cilicia against Levon II, son and successor of Hetum I.[26] In order to reconcile the various branches of the Hetumid dynasty, the late king had married this son to Keran, daughter of the baron Hetum who had been executed for high treason.

Although weakened, the Mongols had not renounced the conquest of Syria, and in 1280, Abagha launched a new attack against the Mamluks. Levon II participated in the first battle of Homs in 1281, and he was close to victory when Abagha's brother Mangu-Timur, leader of the Mongol army, fled panic-stricken.[27] After this defeat, Levon had to sign a peace treaty with the Mamluks in 1285, but he came off well by avoiding territorial losses.[28]

Levon II's death in 1289 marked the beginning of the decline of the Cilician kingdom and the approaching end of Armeno-Mongol ties. None of Levon's successors showed diplomatic skills comparable to the three great monarchs of the thirteenth century. Levon's son, King Hetum II (1289-1307), with several interruptions), was an irresolute character. Caught up in Catholic preachings, he could never decide whether to be king or Franciscan monk.[29] During his reign, in 1295, the new Ilkhan,

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[26] The sources for these two first Mamluk invasions of Cilicia are listed in Mutafian, *Cilicie*, vol. 1, pp. 441-43, 447-49.

[27] See details and sources in Reinhold Röhricht, "Les batailles de Hims," in *Archives de l'Orient latin*, vol. 1 (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1881), pp. 633-42.

[28] The treaty is given in an English translation and discussed by Peter M. Holt, *Early Mamluk Diplomacy* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), pp. 92-103.

[29] About Hetum II, see *Roma - Armenia*, pp. 169-70; Angus D. Stewart, *The Armenian Kingdom and the Mamluks* (Leiden: Brill, 2001).

Ghazan, converted to Islam. Nevertheless, he remained faithful to the Armenian alliance. In 1299, Hetum II allied with him in the invasion of Mamluk Syria and won the second battle of Homs,[30] four decades after his grandfather, Hetum I, had entered victoriously into Damascus and, according to some doubtful sources, even Jerusalem.[31] Although the Mamluks were roundly defeated, Ghazan retreated to his eastern frontier. Soon after, the Mamluks took their revenge and all the gains were lost. Ghazan's reign marked the end of the Armenian alliance with the now Muslim Mongol Ilkhanate.

Armenians and Cypriots (1300-1375)

At the dawn of the fourteenth century, Cilician Armenia was surrounded by Muslim enemies: Mamluks to the east, Mongols to the northeast, and Karamanid Turks to the north and the west.[32] The only remaining Latin state in the Levant was the Lusignan kingdom of Cyprus. The Paleologus' Byzantine Empire was unable to offer any help. Western Europe was torn with conflicts, particularly between France and England, and had lost any interest in the Holy Land despite the countless plans for new Crusades. Many of these projects reserved an important role to Cilician Armenia, but all of them remained unrealized. To make matters worse, the French popes of Avignon conditioned any assistance to the Armenians on the submission of the "heretical" Armenian Church, which deepened the breach between the Armenian pro-Latin and anti-Latin factions.[33]

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[30] For details and sources, see Röhricht, "Hims," pp. 643-52. An interesting complement is given by the contemporary Ibn Taymiyya, *Lettre à un roi croisé*, trans. Jean R. Michot (Louvain-la-Neuve: Bruylant-Academia, 1995), pp. 172-73. See also the illustration in a manuscript copy of Villani reproduced in *Roma - Armenia*, p. 153.

[31] This highly-unlikely Jerusalem episode comes from the pen of the Catholic Armenian propagandist Nerses Palients, in *Documents arméniens*, vol. 1, p. 660.

[32] An effective description of this geopolitical situation is given by Marino Sanuto, "Liber secretorum Fidelium Crucis," lib. I, pars V, ch. 2, in *Gesta Dei*, vol. 2, p. 32. Some of the manuscript copies are decorated by a very suggestive miniature. See *Roma - Armenia*, p. 162.

[33] In 1341, Pope Benedict XII asked for a list of "errors" of the Armenians. The resultant catalogue denounces 117 errors. See the text in Aloysus Tautu, ed., *Acta Benedicti XII* (Vatican: Pontificia Commissio ad redigendum Codicem Iuris canonici orientalis, 1958), pp. 119-55.

In this century of agony, the only concrete diplomatic moves for the Armenian kingdom concerned the kingdom of Cyprus. In 1306, King Henry II Lusignan was overthrown by his brother Amalric of Tyre. Cypriot sources denounce the role of Amalric's wife, Zabel, the ambitious sister of King Hetum II. One may also suspect the participation of the nephew of Hetum I and prince-historian Hetum of Korykos, who had just landed in Cyprus from Cilicia and entered the Catholic Praemonstratensian Order. Moreover, in 1307 Hetum II was put to death by the Mongol governor Pilarghu. Oshin succeeded his brother and played an active role in the Cyprus affair. Amalric was assassinated in 1310 by a Cypriot lord, and the situation turned back to the status quo ante: Henry II recovered his throne.[34]

A reasonable hypothesis is to interpret the plot as a first attempt at uniting the two surviving Christian kingdoms in the Levant: a Cyprus-Cilicia kingdom would have constituted a strong bulwark against Mamluk and Karamanid ambitions. Such attempts were revived during the reign of King Peter I of Cyprus (1358-69). The Armenian kingdom was then reduced to a continental state, having lost the entire seacoast except Korykos. The inhabitants of this isolated port turned to Peter I and requested annexation to Cyprus.[35] Korykos remained a Lusignan stronghold on the continent until its capture by the Karamanids in 1448. In 1368, Peter I was also offered the rest of the Armenian kingdom, although one cannot know whether he would have accepted it, as he was murdered in 1369.[36] This offer was to be one of the final diplomatic moves of the last Armenian kingdom. Six years later, Sis fell into Mamluk hands. The year 1375 marks the end of Armenian kingship.

The last Armenian king, Levon V Lusignan, was taken prisoner to Cairo. A few years later, the king of Castile paid the ransom for his liberation, and Levon left Egypt for Europe in

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[34] Among the various sources describing this plot, the most detailed is perhaps Francesco Amadi, *Chronique*, ed. René de Mas Latrie (Paris: Imp. nationale, 1891), pp. 248-329. About the role of the baron Hetum, see Claude Mutafian, "Héthoum de Korykos," *Cahiers de Recherches médiévales* 1 (1996): 168-71.

[35] See Amadi, *Chronique*, pp. 410-11.

[36] Guillaume de Machaut, *The Capture of Alexandria*, trans. Janet Shirley (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), pp. 157-58. For Peter's assassination, see Amadi, *Chronique*, pp. 425-26.

1382, settled in Paris two years later, and struggled to organize a new Crusade against the Mamluks. The main obstacle was the Hundred Years' War, and the exiled king did not spare his efforts to help settle the conflict between France and England. He traveled to London, and succeeded in organizing discussions for reconciliation.[37] Although fruitless, his activity may be considered a last flicker of the erstwhile Armenian kingdom's wise diplomacy.

[37] The first serious work about King Levon V is in Armenian: Karapet Basmajian, *Levon V Lusinian* (Paris: Basmajian, 1908). For a more recent study, see Henriette Kühl, *Levon V von Kleinarmenien* (Frankfurt-am-Main: Peter Lang, 2000); see pp. 227-46 for Levon's diplomatic activities.